



UNIVERSITY OF
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IFAS EXTENSION

Friday's Feature

By

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Forcing amaryllis bulbs provide holiday color

Amaryllis bulbs are popular for "forcing" during the winter. Forcing bulbs means growing them to bloom earlier than they would under normal landscape conditions.

Amaryllis bulbs are commonly available from November to late December and make great Christmas gifts. Forcing them to bloom during the winter is not difficult and the results are beautiful.

Dan Gill, LSU AgCenter Horticulturist, provides the following tips on how to grow beautiful amaryllis during the winter.

Amaryllis bulbs purchased now should be planted into pots using a well-drained potting soil. Position the bulb's neck above the soil surface. The pot should be large enough so that there is about one inch of clearance between the pot rim and the bulb.

Clay or plastic pots may be used, but since an amaryllis in bloom can be somewhat top-heavy, heavier clay pots provide a little more stability.

You can also buy amaryllis bulbs pre-planted in pots and ready to grow. However you obtain them, once they're planted, place the pot in a sunny window (the more sun the better) and keep the soil evenly moist. When the flower stalk begins to emerge, rotate the pot about one-half turn every few days, so it will grow straight. Otherwise, it will grow toward the window and look awkward. Also keep in mind that if you provide your amaryllis with too little light, the flower stalk will grow excessively tall and may even fall over.



After the flower spike has emerged, leaves will grow from the top of the bulb. After the flowers have faded, cut the stalk at the point where it emerges from the bulb, but do not cut any foliage. Keep the plant inside and continue to provide plenty of sun, or the leaves will be weak. Water it regularly when the soil begins to feel dry, but fertilizing is not really necessary during this time.

In April, you may plant your bulbs in the garden where they will make a long-lived plant that blooms in the spring. Amaryllis planted in the garden this coming spring will resume their natural cycle and bloom in the following years.

Amaryllis plants thrive in any reasonably good garden soil as long as drainage is good. A spot that receives part sun (about four to six hours of direct sun and then shade in the afternoon) is the ideal location. However, amaryllis can be grown in full sun to part shade. Once planted and established, amaryllis can be left alone for several years. A light sprinkling of general purpose fertilizer in spring and watering during unusually dry weather is all they need.

Beds with amaryllis should be mulched with an inch or two of pine straw, leaves or other similar material to help reduce weeds and conserve moisture. Increase the thickness of the mulch to three to four inches during the winter to help protect the bulbs from freeze damage.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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